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ABSTRACT

The present invention relates to glial cell line-derived neurotrophic factor (GDNF), a potent neurotrophin that exhibits a broad spectrum of biological activities on a variety of cell types from both the central and peripheral nervous systems. The present invention involves the cloning and characterization of receptors for GDNF. Nucleic acid and amino acid sequences are described for GDNFR protein products. A hydrophobic domain with the features of a signal peptide is found at the amino terminus, while a second hydrophobic domain at the carboxy terminus is involved in the linkage of the receptor to the cell membrane. The lack of a transmembrane domain and cytoplasmic region indicates that GDNFR requires one or more accessory molecules in order to mediate transmembrane signaling. GDNFR mRNA is widely distributed in both nervous system and non-neural tissues, consistent with the similar distribution found for GDNF.

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